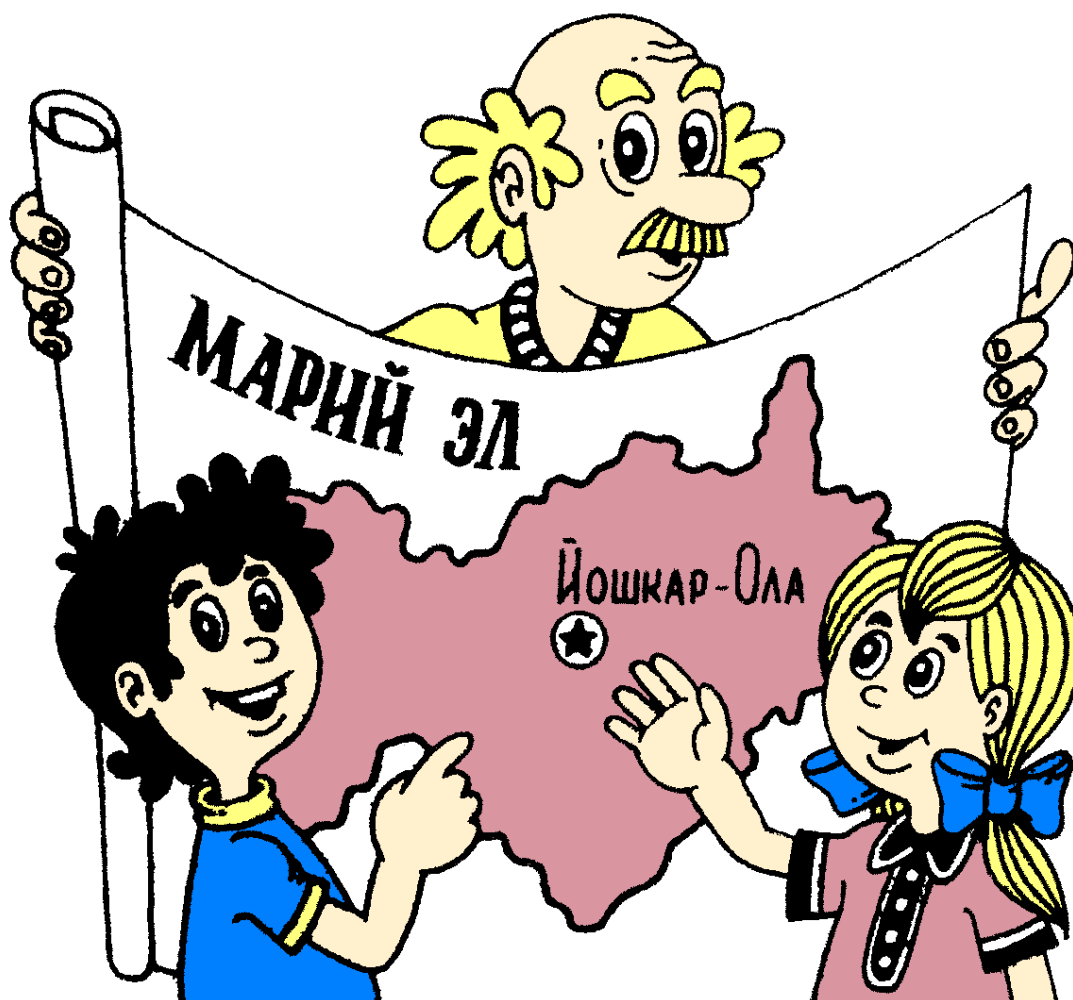


Introduction



0) The Mari language

Mari belongs to the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family and is thus related to languages such as Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, and Saami, as well as to a number of other languages spoken in Russia – for example, Mordvin, Komi, and Udmurt. According to the last All-Russian Census of 2010, approximately 550,000 people in the Russian Federation consider themselves to belong to the Mari people, and of these around 70% claimed Mari as their mother tongue. The majority of these people are concentrated in the central Volga area in the Republic Mari El as well as in neighboring regions. There is also a sizable Mari minority further to the east, in Bashkiria. Literary Mari exists in two variants, Meadow Mari and Hill Mari. Meadow Mari, which is used by the great majority of Mari speakers, is the language variant that is presented in this book.

This introduction consists of the following sections: 1) the sounds of the Mari language, 2) the Mari alphabet (representation of the sounds in writing), 3) palatalization in Mari, 4) stress in Mari words, 5) vowel harmony in Mari, 6) consonant alternation, 7) Russian loan words, 8) a language sample (transcription of the lyrics of a song included in the audio materials accompanying this book, and 9) exercises related to Mari pronunciation and orthography.

1) The sounds of the Mari language

a) Consonants (согласный-влак): In the modern Mari literary language the following consonant phonemes can be distinguished. The symbols used here are those of the Finno-Ugric Transcription which will be used in this book when transcriptions are necessary.

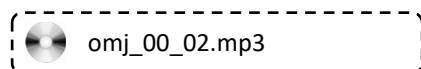
		Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar
Stop	Voiceless	p		t			k
	Voiced	b		d			g
Fricative	Voiceless		f	s	š		
	Voiced	β	v	z	ž		χ
Affricate				c		č	
Nasal		m		n		ɲ	ŋ
Lateral				l		l'	
Trill				r			
Approximant						j	

Note that this table omits Russian palatalized consonants found in some loan words, i.e., /t'/, /d'/, /s'/, /š'/, /ž'/, and /r'/.

The same table in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for comparison:

		Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar
Stop	Voiceless	p		t			k
	Voiced	b		d			g
Fricative	Voiceless		f	s	ʃ		
	Voiced	β	v	z	ʒ		x
Affricate				c		tʃ	
Nasal		m		n		ɲ	ŋ
Lateral				l		ɭ	
Trill				r			
Approximant						j	

Notes on individual consonants – stressed vowels in Mari are bolded:



1. p: voiceless bilabial stop, like English p (**sp**ark)

/pört/	house	/optaš/	to place
/pu/	tree; wood	/šüşpêk/	nightingale
/pel/	half	/čaple/	lovely
/šopo/	sour	/üp/	hair
/üpan/	haired, having hair	/šêp/	calm
/kopa/	palm of the hand	/žap/	time

2. b: voiced bilabial stop, like English b (ball)

This consonant appears predominantly in loan words and descriptive words, as well as in the combination /mb/.

Due to terminal devoicing, this phoneme cannot occur in word-final position – see point 5 of the introduction (page 38).

/boks/	boxing
/benzin/	gas (petrol)
/tabu/	taboo
/kombo/	goose
/šümbel/	darling

3. k: voiceless velar stop, like English c (scar) or k (skin)

/keće/	sun; day	/ške/	oneself; own
/kö/	who	/pikš/	arrow
/kok/	two	/akret/	ancient
/aka/	(elder) sister	/ik/	one
/tūkaš/	to touch	/jūk/	voice; sound
/šuko/	much; many	/adək/	again

4. g: voiced velar stop, like English g (good)

For peculiarities affecting the pronunciation and distribution of this sound, see section 5 of this introduction (page 38).

Older sources will denote this phoneme as a voiced velar fricative /ɣ/ in most positions. This pronunciation is no longer common.

/gân/	if	/šogaš/	to stand
/goč/	through	/tuge/	like that
/gâč/	from	/kugu/	big
		/ikgaj/	alike
		/pongo/	mushroom
		/erge/	son

5. t: voiceless dental stop, like English t (star)

/tele/	winter	/ikte/	one
/tide/	this	/utla/	excessively
/tušto/	there	/ertaš/	to walk by
/oto/	grove	/kudât/	six
/jatâr/	very much	/čot/	a lot
/βate/	wife	/jot/	foreign

6. d: voiced dental stop, like English d (duck)

For peculiarities affecting the pronunciation and distribution of this sound, see section 5 of this introduction (page 38).

Older sources will denote this phoneme as a voiced dental fricative /ð/ in most positions, akin to th in *this*. This pronunciation is no longer common.

/dene/	with	/mondaš/	to forget
/deke/	to	/pârdâž/	wall
/deč/	from	/kinde/	bread
/čodâra/	forest		
/uda/	bad		
/odo/	Udmurt		

7. β: voiced bilabial fricative

This sound does not occur in English. It is equivalent to the Spanish intervocalic b (*nube*). It does not occur in word-final position. It should also be noted that younger speakers usually pronounce this sound as a voiced labiodental fricative /v/.

/βate/	wife	/soβla/	spoon
/βer/	place	/sörβalaš/	to beg, to plead
/βuj/	head	/türβö/	lips
/aβa/	mother		
/leβe/	warm		
/kaβa/	sky		

8. f: voiceless labiodental fricative, like English f (father)

This sound is exclusively found in loan words.

/fakt/	fact
/šef/	boss
/afrike/	Africa
/cellofan/	cellophane

9. v: voiced labiodental fricative, like English v (vase)

Traditionally, this sound was exclusively used in Russian loan words. In recent years, however, it has replaced /β/ in all contexts among younger speakers.

Due to terminal devoicing, this phoneme cannot occur in word-final position – see section 5 of this introduction (page 38).

/vaze/	vase
/d'ivan/	couch, sofa
/avgust/	August

10. s: voiceless alveolar fricative, like English s (sun)

/saj/	good	/porsên/	silk
/ser/	shore	/jüksö/	swan
/satu/	goods	/posna/	separate
/pasu/	field	/tüs/	color
/jösö/	difficult	/kas/	evening
/püsö/	sharp	/pârês/	cat

11. z: voiced alveolar fricative, like English z (zoo)

In the first position, this sound occurs only in Russian loan words.

/zal/	hall	/urzo/	handful
		/üzgar/	object
		/süzlö/	awl
/küzaš/	to climb	/tenêz/	sea
/aza/	baby	/kagaz/	paper
/izi/	small	/negêz/	foundation

12. š: voiceless postalveolar fricative, like English sh (show)

/šêl/	meat	/umša/	mouth
/šij/	silver	/jüštö/	cold
/šodo/	lung	/βaštar/	maple
/ušem/	union	/ješ/	family
/üşan/	faith	/ruš/	Russian
/paša/	work	/ulaš/	to be

13. ž: voiced postalveolar fricative, like English s in leisure, measure

In the first position, this sound primarily occurs in loan words.

/žap/	time	/ožno/	earlier
/žest/	gesture	/užga/	fur
		/kuržaš/	to run
/kužu/	long	/mardež/	wind
/užaš/	part	/eŋðž/	raspberry
/šəže/	fall	/kenjež/	summer

14. χ: voiceless velar fricative

This sound does not occur in English, but is a common sound in German, where it is spelled ch (*machen*). In Mari, it occurs only in Russian loan words.

/χor/	choir
/kolχoz/	kolkhoz
/ceχ/	work hall

15. j: palatal approximant, like English y (yard)

/jot/	foreign	/sajlaš/	to elect
/jön/	method	/ojgo/	grief
/jer/	lake	/pajrem/	holiday
/pojan/	rich	/βuj/	head
/kajaš/	to go	/saj/	good
/püja/	dam	/toj/	brass, bronze

16. c: voiceless alveolar affricate, like English ts (cats)

This sound occurs primarily in loan words.

/ceχ/	work hall
/racion/	ration
/molod'ec/	well done!
/akcent/	accent

17. ċ: voiceless alveolo-palatal affricate, similar to English ch (**church**)

/čân/	true	/monč̣a/	bathhouse, sauna
/č̣on/	soul	/küďârč̣ö/	thunder
/č̣äβ̣e/	chicken	/tič̣maš/	whole
/ač̣a/	father	/lač̣/	exactly
/č̣üč̣ü/	(maternal) uncle	/küč̣/	finger nail
/koč̣o/	bitter	/küṣ̌äč̣/	from above

18. m: bilabial nasal, like English m (**man**)

/mo/	what	/im̄ne/	horse
/m̄aj/	I	/omsa/	door
/m̄ükš̄/	bee	/olma/	apple
/omo/	sleep; dream	/id̄m/	threshing floor
/jumo/	god	/tam/	flavor
/tumo/	oak	/em/	medicine

19. n: alveolar nasal, like English n (**no**)

/ner/	nose	/janda/	glass
/nare/	roughly	/tumna/	owl
/nele/	heavy; difficult	/sösna/	pig
/tenij/	this year	/č̣on/	soul
/tarβanaš̄/	to move	/tagan/	heel
/dene/	with	/ijan/	icy

20. ñ: palatal nasal, like English ny (**canyon**)

/ñimo/	nothing	/im̄ne/	horse
/ñem̄äč̣/	German	/ar̄ña/	week
/ñust̄äk/	sullen	/kürt̄ñö/	iron
/tũña/	world	/püt̄ñ/	all, everything
/β̄ñer/	canvas	/kut̄ñ/	along
/m̄ñar/	how many	/suḡñ/	blessing

21. ŋ: velar nasal, like English ng (song)

This sound does not occur in the first position.

		/poŋgo/	mushroom
		/šoŋšo/	hedgehog
		/jeŋga/	sister-in-law
/oŋa/	board	/čaŋ/	bell
/šâŋa/	mosquito	/oŋ/	breast
/eŋer/	river	/jeŋ/	person

It is important to note the difference between /ŋ/ and the sound combination /ŋg/.

/βeŋe/	son-in-law	/meŋge/	column
/čaŋa/	jackdaw	/koŋga/	oven, stove
/oŋa/	board	/šoŋgo/	old

22. l: alveolar lateral approximant, like English l (like)

/leβe/	warm	/kumlo/	thirty
/lač/	exactly	/polšaš/	to help
/lupš/	whip	/süzlö/	awl
/kolo/	twenty	/el/	land
/nele/	difficult	/nêl/	four
/ilaš/	to live	/kol/	fish

23. l': palatal lateral approximant

This sound is found in Italian, where it is denoted by *gl* (*figlio*). It also occurs sporadically in some variants of English, for example in the word *million*.

/l'uβâk/	messy (person)	/pârl'a/	together
/l'ârgaš/	to giggle	/βârl'ange/	wagtail
/l'apkaš/	to chatter	/pügêl'mö/	cone
/šül'ö/	oat	/mugêl'/	scornfully
/kogêl'o/	pie	/kul'/	bast sack
/šol'o/	(younger) brother	/cel'/	target

24. r: alveolar trill

The Mari r is equivalent to the r found in continental European languages (e.g., Italian, Russian) and not to the English r.

/ruaš/	dough	/erge/	son
/rodo/	relative	/arña/	week
/rüdö/	center	/jorlo/	poor
/aru/	clean	/jer/	lake
/öräš/	moustache	/βür/	blood
/jöra/	good, fine	/ejer/	river

b) Vowels (гласный-влак): The Mari literary language has the following vowel phonemes, in Finno-Ugric Transcription:

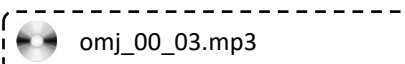
	Front		Central		Back	
	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded
Close	i	ü				u
Mid	e	ö	ə			o
Open					a	

In IPA:

	Front		Central		Back	
	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded
Close	i	y				u
Mid	e	ø	ɤ			o
Open					a	

Length is not a distinctive feature in Mari: there are no long and short vowels (though the reduced vowel /ə/ is a bit shorter than other vowels); there are also no diphthongs.

Notes on individual vowels:

**1. i: close unrounded front vowel**

Like i in German or Latin, or English ea in *easy*.

/nine/	these	/indeš/	nine
/pij/	dog	/nij/	bast
/pire/	wolf	/imne/	horse
/ige/	animal young	/igeče/	weather
/izi/	small	/βij/	power
/iläš/	life	/ik/	one

2. u: close rounded back vowel

Like u in German or Latin, or English oo in *moon*.

/tudo/	(s)he	/aru/	clean
/nuno/	they	/kugu/	big
/βuj/	head	/pasu/	field
/ulaš/	to be	/užaš/	part
/tušto/	there	/usta/	skilled
/uke/	no; none	/ušem/	union

3. ü: close rounded front vowel

This sound does not occur in English, but is common in German, where it is denoted by ü (*müde*), and in French, where it is denoted by u (*tu*).

/üp/	hair	/üdâr/	daughter; girl
/tür/	edge	/ümâl/	shadow
/küzö/	knife	/üβö/	willow
/kütü/	herd	/kü/	stone
/üj/	butter	/küštaš/	to bake
/müj/	honey	/küčâk/	short

4. a: open unrounded back vowel

Like a in German or Latin, or English a in *father*.

/ak/	price	/joča/	child
/aβa/	mother	/saj/	good
/tau/	thank you	/pasu/	field
/ulam/	I am	/paša/	work
/oŋaj/	interesting	/ijan/	icy
/jeda/	every	/žap/	time

5. o: mid rounded back vowel

Like o in German or Latin, or English o in *more*. Note the reduction of this sound in word-final position when not stressed – see points 4 (page 37) and 6 (page 39) of this introduction.

/mo/	what	/molo/	other
/koka/	aunt	/oto/	grove
/βož/	root	/korno/	path
/jot/	foreign	/tušto/	there
/βošt/	through	/kolo/	twenty
/joŋež/	bow (weapon)	/šošo/	spring

6. e: mid unrounded front vowel

Like e in German or Latin, or English e in *end*. Note the reduction of this sound in word-final position when not stressed – see points 4 (page 37) and 6 (page 39) of this introduction.

/ere/	always	/tele/	winter
/me/	we	/keće/	sun; day
/eŋer/	river	/erge/	son
/ner/	nose	/imńe/	horse
/tenge/	ruble	/tâize/	moon; month
/kue/	birch	/nele/	heavy; difficult

7. ö: mid rounded front vowel

This sound does not occur in English, but is common in German, where it is denoted by ö (*möglich*), and in French, where it is denoted by eu (*peur*). Note the reduction of this sound in word-final position when not stressed – see points 4 (page 37) and 6 (page 39) of this introduction.

/pört/	house	/jösö/	difficult
/örš/	bullfinch	/körgö/	insides
/kö/	who	/βül'ö/	mare
/jön/	method	/rüdö/	center
/sösna/	pig	/šüdü/	hundred
/jöra/	good, fine	/küzö/	knife

8. â: mid unrounded central vowel

This reduced vowel is pronounced similarly to the English reduced vowel that is denoted in different ways (*alone, lemon, heaven*).

/tâize/	moon; month	/erâk/	freedom
/tunâktâšo/	teacher	/âl'e/	was
/âr/	kopeck	/ječâze/	skier
/kâzât/	now	/pâlâš/	ear
/mâjân/	my	/jâr/	around
/tâ/	this	/omâdâmâlâk/	insomnia

Sound samples and usage examples of the sounds in question from languages of the world can easily be found, for example, on Wikipedia – en.wikipedia.org – by searching the given description (e.g., “palatal lateral approximant”).

2) The Mari alphabet

The Mari alphabet is based on the Cyrillic alphabet in its Russian variant and consists of 36 letters. Three of these do not occur in the Russian alphabet (*ö, ý, Һ*) and several letters are primarily used in writing Russian loan words (*ě, ђ, х, ц, ы*). The system of palatalization in Mari differs greatly from that in Russian and will be discussed separately below. Capitalization generally follows the same rules in Mari as it does in English: The first word of a sentence and proper names are capitalized. The letters *Һ, Ъ* and *Ы* do not occur in word-initial position, and thus only occur in their upper-case forms in all-caps texts. As the italic forms of letters are quite distinct in some cases, these are given in the table below as well.

Standard		Italics		Phonetic value
А	а	А	а	/a/
Б	б	Б	б	/b/
В	в	В	в	/β/ ~ /v/ (see 1.a.7., 1.a.9.)
Г	г	Г	г	/g/ (~ /ɣ/)
Д	д	Д	д	/d/ (~ /δ/)
Е	е	Е	е	/e/; /je/ (see below)
Ё	ё	Ё	ё	/o/; /jo/ (see below)
Ж	ж	Ж	ж	/ʒ/
З	з	З	з	/z/
И	и	И	и	/i/
Й	й	Й	й	/j/
К	к	К	к	/k/
Л	л	Л	л	/l/
М	м	М	м	/m/
Н	н	Н	н	/n/
(Н)	Һ	(Н)	Һ	/ŋ/
О	о	О	о	/o/
Ö	ö	Ö	ö	/ö/
П	п	П	п	/p/
Р	р	Р	р	/r/
С	с	С	с	/s/
Т	т	Т	т	/t/
У	у	У	у	/u/
Ў	ў	Ў	ў	/ü/
Ф	ф	Ф	ф	/f/
Х	х	Х	х	/x/
Ц	ц	Ц	ц	/c/
Ч	ч	Ч	ч	/č/
Ш	ш	Ш	ш	/š/
Щ	щ	Щ	щ	/ś/
(Ъ)	Ъ	(Ъ)	Ъ	hard sign
Ы	ы	Ы	ы	/ə/
(Ь)	ь	(Ь)	ь	soft sign
Э	э	Э	э	/e/ (see below)
Ю	ю	Ю	ю	/u/; /ju/ (see below)
Я	я	Я	я	/a/; /ja/ (see below)

The hand-written letters of the Mari alphabet are:

А	Аа	И	Ии	П	Пп	Ч	Чч
Б	Бб	Й	Йй	Р	Рр	Ш	Шш
В	Вв	К	Кк	С	Сс	Щ	Щщ
Г	Гг	Л	Лл	Т	Тт	Ъ	Ъъ
Д	Дд	М	Мм	У	Уу	Ы	Ыы
Е	Ее	Н	Нн	ӱ	ӱӱ	Ь	Ьь
Ё	Ёё	Н	н	Ф	Фф	Э	Ээ
Ж	Жж	О	Оо	Х	Хх	Ю	Юю
З	Зз	Ӗ	ӖӖ	Ц	Цц	Я	Яя

The following sample text illustrates how the individual letters are connected in writing:

<i>Ото</i> Ото
<i>Ик тымык ото уло мемнан элыште,</i> Ик тымык ото уло мемнан элыште,
<i>Шога тудо ото кугу ер серыште.</i> Шога тудо ото кугу ер серыште.
<i>Тушто ладыра деч ладыра пушенге кушкеш.</i> Тушто ладыра деч ладыра пушенге кушкеш.
<i>Тушто мотор деч мотор саска шочеш.</i> Тушто мотор деч мотор саска шочеш.
<i>Тушто, ужар лышташ лонгаште, шўшпык мур.</i> Тушто, ужар лышташ лонгаште, шўшпык мур.
<i>Тудо ото гыч ерышке яндар памаш йога.</i> Тудо ото гыч ерышке яндар памаш йога.
<i>Тушто шудыжат ужаргырак,</i> Тушто шудыжат ужаргырак,
<i>Тушто пеледышыжат сылнырак.</i> Тушто пеледышыжат сылнырак.
<i>Тудо отым мый йöратем,</i> Тудо отым мый йöратем,
<i>Тушто пушенге руышым мый вурсем.</i> Тушто пушенге руышым мый вурсем.
<i>(С. Чавайн)</i> (С. Чавайн)

Notes on individual letters:

1. Hard sign (ѣ): This letter has no sound value of its own. In Russian it serves only to indicate that the preceding letter is not palatalized (see below) and it occurs very rarely. It is not needed for such a function in Mari, but is used in compounds where the first word ends in a consonant and the second word starts with the letter *е*, *я*, or *ю*, to mark the boundary of the compounds and, in the case of *е*, to indicate that the letter is pronounced as /je/ and not as /e/. Examples: *пӧръеҥ* /pörjeŋ/ 'man' (cf. *кӱрен* /küren/ 'brown'), *йыръюж* /jêrjuž/ 'atmosphere'.

2. Soft sign (ь): This letter has no sound value of its own and serves only to indicate that the preceding letter is palatalized (see below). Example: *кольмо* /kol'mo/ 'shovel'.

3. The letters *е*, *ю*, and *я* are pronounced /je/, /ju/, and /ja/ respectively in the following positions:

- a) In word-initial position: *еш* /ješ/ 'family', *юж* /juž/ 'air', *ял* /jal/ 'village'.
- b) After other vowels: *мием* /mijem/ 'I go', *июнь* /ijuň/ 'June', *ияш* /ijaš/ 'to swim'.
- c) After the hard sign (ѣ) and the soft sign (ь): *пӧръеҥ* /pörjeŋ/ 'man', *коньяк* /koňjak/ 'cognac'. Note that the letter combinations *ье*, *ью* and *ья* only occur in loan words.

In addition, *ю* and *я* are used to indicate the palatalization of a preceding *н* or *л* (see below).

4. The letter *ё* /jo/, which in Russian can firstly be used to indicate the palatalization of a preceding consonant followed by the sound /o/ or secondly the sound sequence /jo/ in word-initial or syllable-initial position or after the soft and hard signs, is used in Mari only in Russian loan words, e.g., *ёршик* /joršik/ 'brush', *самолёт* /samol'ot/ 'airplane'. The sound sequence /jo/ is written *йо* in Mari: *йошкар* /joškar/ 'red'.

3) Palatalization

Two consonants are capable of palatalization in Mari: *н* and *л*. There is thus a contrast between /n/ and /ń/ and between /l/ and /l'/. There are two possibilities for indicating palatalization of these two consonants: a) the use of the soft sign *ь*, and b) the use of the letters *ю* and *я*.

a) Soft sign (ь): The soft sign indicates that a preceding *н* or *л* is palatalized. Thus, *нь* = /ń/ and *ль* = /l'/. The soft sign is used in this way between consonants, in word-final position, and before the vowels *о*, *ө*, and *ы*. Examples: *ыльым* /êl'êtm/ 'I was', *ыльна* /êl'na/ 'we were', *кольмо* /kol'mo/ 'shovel', *шӱльӧ* /šül'ö/ 'oats', *тупынь* /tupêń/ 'reverse'.

b) *ю*, *я*: These letters indicate that a preceding *н* or *л* is palatalized. Thus *ню* = /ńu/, *ня* = /ńa/, *лю* = /l'u/ and *ля* = /l'a/. Examples: *лювыра* /l'uβêra/ 'silt', *ляпкаш* /l'apkaš/ 'to chatter', *коля* /kol'a/ 'mouse', *арня* /arńa/ 'week'.

Before the vowels /e/ and /i/ (*е*, *и*) the palatalization of *н* and *л* is not indicated in writing. This means that the letter sequences *не*, *ни*, *ле*, and *ли* can be read either as /ne/ or /ńe/, /ni/ or /ńi/, /le/ or /l'e/ and /li/ or /l'i/, respectively. Examples: *неле* /nele/ 'heavy; difficult' –

неле /nel'e/ '(s)he swallowed', *теле* /tele/ 'winter', *имне* /im'ne/ 'horse', *нине* /nine/ 'these', *нигö* /'nigö/ 'nobody'. Since the palatalization of *н* and *л* before /e/ and /i/ is unpredictable, palatalization of *н* and *л* before *e* and *u* will be marked in this book using an apostrophe. For example, the word *имне* 'horse' will be written in this book as *имн'е*. It should be remembered that this is not a feature of standard Mari orthography.

Note that Russian distinguishes between palatalized and non-palatalized consonants to a higher degree, and that further consonants in addition to *н* and *л* can be palatalized in Russian loan words. As these are used frequently in Mari, and as Mari orthography is based on Russian orthography, this aspect of Russian will be illustrated here in a simplified fashion. All Russian words used in the forthcoming tables are used as loan words in Mari. Note that some finer aspects of Russian pronunciation are not taken into consideration in the transcriptions; more detailed information on the pronunciation of Russian words can easily be found in Russian grammar books or on the Internet.

The Russian language has ten vowel symbols that make up five pairs: *а* ~ *я*, *э* ~ *е*, *ы* ~ *и*, *о* ~ *ё*, *у* ~ *ю*. Which letter of a pair is used is determined more by the nature of the sound preceding a vowel than by the sound of the vowel itself (though some differences exist here too, especially in the case of *ы* ~ *и*). When the vowel signs *я е и ё ю* are used after a consonant, this consonant is palatalized. Consonants immediately preceding the vowels *а э ы о у* are not. When the letters *я е ё ю* are used in other positions – at the beginning of a word, after the soft sign *ь* and hard sign *ъ*, after a second vowel – they signify that the sound /j/ precedes the vowel sound. The following table illustrates these oppositions, the relevant parts of the words given as examples are underlined. In the following tables, the symbol # indicates a word boundary, an uppercase V a vowel (or letter representing a vowel) of choice, an uppercase C a consonant (or letter representing a consonant) of choice and C' a palatalized consonant of choice. (If C is contrasted with C', C can be understood to indicate a non-palatalized consonant.) In this nomenclature, #_ is used to indicate cases in which the letter in question occurs in the initial position, C_ when it occurs after a consonant, etc.

		#_	ь_; ь_	V_	C_
а /a/		август /avgust/ 'August'	-	туалет /tua'et/ 'toilet'	лагерь /lage'/'/ 'camp'
	я /ja/; 'a/	японец /japo'nes/ 'Japanese'	коньяк /koñjak/ 'cognac'	фаянс /fajans/ 'faience'	табулятор /tabul'ator/ 'tabulator'
э /e/		электрон /el'ektron/ 'electron'	-	поэт /poet/ 'poet'	сэр /ser/ 'sir'
	е /je/; 'e/	евро /jevro/ 'Euro'	субъект /subjekt/ 'subject'	проект /projekt/ 'draft; project'	текст /t'ekst/ 'text'
ы /i/		-	-	-	тактичный /takt'ičnij/ 'tactful'
	и /i/; /'i/	индекс /ind'eks/ 'index'	-	украинец /ukrai'nes/ 'Ukrainian'	инстинкт /inst'inkt/ 'instinct'
о /o/		октябрь /okt'abr'/' 'October'	павильон /pav'il'on/ 'pavilion'	виртуоз /virtuoz/ 'virtuoso'	талон /talon/ 'coupon'
	ё /jo/; 'o/	ёршик /joršik/ 'brush'	подъёмник /podjom'nik/ 'elevator'	приём /prijom/ 'reception'	лётчик /l'otčik/ 'pilot'
у /u/		узбек /uzb'ek/ 'Uzbek'	-	клоун /kloun/ 'clown'	турист /tu'rist/ 'tourist'
	ю /ju/; 'u/	юрист /jurist/ 'lawyer'	адъютант /adjutant/ 'aide'	союз /sojuz/ 'union'	шлюз /šl'uz/ 'sluice'

When palatalization cannot be marked by using *я е и ё ю* after a consonant – i.e., when said consonant is at the end of a word, followed by a second consonant, or followed by an *о* in some cases (the usage of *ё* in Russian is restricted) – the soft sign *ь* is used.

When a soft and hard sign precedes the letters *я е ё ю*, the vowel sound is preceded by the sound /j/. In these cases, the soft and hard signs, not the following vowel sign, determine the character of the preceding consonant.

		_#	C_C	_j/	_o
ь		-	-	адъютант /adjutant/ 'aide'	-
	ь	писатель /p'isat'el'/' 'writer'	фильтр /f'il'tr/ 'filter'	коньяк /koñjak/ 'cognac'	павильон /pav'il'on/ 'pavilion'

To summarize:

	Example	Transcription	Translation
C + V	ка <u>то</u> д	/kat <u>o</u> d/	cathode
C' + V	ко <u>сто</u> м	/kost' <u>u</u> m/	suit; costume
C + /j/ + V	а <u>д</u> е <u>к</u> т <u>и</u> в	/ad <u>je</u> kt' <u>i</u> v/	adjective
C' + /j/ + V	ко <u>мп</u> ь <u>ю</u> тер	/kom <u>p</u> j <u>u</u> ter/	computer

As can be seen, palatalization is predictable in Russian orthography. Thus, palatalization will not generally be indicated in Russian loan words using an apostrophe as it is done in other cases (e.g., *имн'е* /imné/ 'horse'). An exception will be made with lexemes ending in a soft sign ь in Russian. Here, the palatalization is marked in the base form, but the soft sign can disappear in accordance with Mari orthographic rules in inflected forms: e.g., *печать* /pěčat'/ 'seal, stamp' > *печатем* /pěčat'em/ 'my seal, my stamp'. Here, an apostrophe will be used to indicate the palatalization which is not indicated in the inflected form: *печат'ем*.

The manner in which the Russian system was adopted in Mari differs from vowel to vowel. For /a/ (a ~ я) and /u/ (y ~ ю), the system was taken over consistently.

		#_	ь_; ъ_	у_	с_
a /a/		а <u>в</u> а /a <u>β</u> a/ 'mother'	-	ру <u>а</u> ш /ru <u>a</u> š/ 'dough'	у <u>н</u> а /u <u>n</u> a/ 'guest'
	я /ja/; 'a/	я <u>л</u> /ja <u>l</u> / 'village'	-	по <u>я</u> н /po <u>j</u> an/ 'rich'	ар <u>н</u> я /ar <u>n</u> ja/ 'week'
y /u/		у <u>р</u> /u <u>r</u> / 'squirrel'	-	та <u>у</u> /ta <u>u</u> / 'thank you'	л <u>у</u> /l <u>u</u> / 'bone'
	ю /ju/; 'u/	ю <u>ж</u> /ju <u>ž</u> / 'air'	-	омы <u>ю</u> /om <u>ê</u> ju/ 'drowsiness'	лю <u>в</u> ык /l' <u>u</u> β <u>ê</u> k/ 'messy (person)'

In the case of /e/ (э ~ e) and /i/ (и), the vowel signs behave as their Russian counterparts when they do not follow consonant signs. If, however, the vowels /e/ and /i/ follow the consonant signs л and н, only the vowel signs e and u are used, regardless of the possible palatalization of the preceding consonant. This means that in these cases the correct pronunciation cannot be derived from the orthography.

		#_	ь; ъ_	в_	с_
э /e/		э́р /ér/ 'morning'	-	шү́эм /ʃúem/ 'I throw'	-
	е /je/; /e/; /'e/	е́р /jé'r/ 'lake'	пöръе́н /pörjé'n/ 'man'	шүе́м /ʃújem/ 'I stretch'	не́ле /néle/ 'difficult' не́ле /nel'è/ '(s)he swallowed'
	и /i/; /'i/	и́р /ír/ 'wild'	-	-	ни́не /níne/ 'these' ни́гунам /nígunam/ 'never'

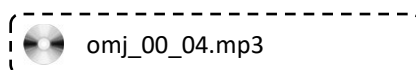
The other vowel sounds – /o/, /ö/, /ü/, /â/ – are only represented by one vowel sign each in Mari (о ö ү ъ). Palatalization of consonants preceding these is marked with the soft sign, the sound /j/ preceding these is marked with the letter ъ.

	/j/_	ь_
ы /â/	ѣ́лме /jêlme/ 'tongue; language'	креса́нѣ́к /kresañêk/ 'peasant'
о /o/	ѣ́рло /jôrlo/ 'poor'	когы́льо /kogêl'ô/ 'pie'
ö /ö/	ѣ́он /jôn/ 'method'	кү́ртнѣ́ö /kürtñö/ 'iron'
ү /ü/	ѣ́ула /jüla/ 'custom'	-

Note that the different manner in which palatalization, or the sound /j/, is marked in Mari depending on what vowel sound – if any – follows causes changes in orthography when one vowel is replaced by another in declination, conjugation or derivation, or when a vowel is deleted or added. These orthographic forms are, however, consistent with Mari orthography; it is especially evident in transcription that no irregularities actually occur here:

<i>лияш</i> /lijaš/ 'to be' (stem /lij-/):	<i>лийше</i> /lijše/ 'being' <i>лиеш</i> /liješ/ 'it is' <i>лийын</i> /lijân/ 'it was'
<i>вуй</i> /βui/ 'head' :	<i>вуйын</i> /βuiân/ 'of the head' <i>вуем</i> /βuiem/ 'my head' <i>вуйат</i> /βuiat/ 'and the head'
<i>имне</i> /imñe/ 'horse':	<i>имньын</i> /imñân/ 'of the horse' <i>имнем</i> /imñem/ 'my horse' <i>имнят</i> /imñat/ 'and the horse'
<i>когыльо</i> /kogâl'o/ 'pie':	<i>когыльын</i> /kogâl'ân/ 'of the pie' <i>когылем</i> /kogâl'em/ 'my pie' <i>когылят</i> /kogâl'at/ 'and the pie'
<i>сугынь</i> /sugâñ/ 'blessing':	<i>сугыньын</i> /sugâñân/ 'of the blessing' <i>сугынем</i> /sugâñem/ 'my blessing' <i>сугынят</i> /sugâñat/ 'and the blessing'

4) Stress



Stress (*ударений*) in Mari is not bound to a certain syllable, but as a general rule falls on the last full vowel of the word. Full vowels are all vowels apart from a) the vowel *ы* /â/ and b) unstressed *e*, *o*, and *ö* in word-final position. (These vowels are almost always unstressed in the final position. Certain words and suffixes exist that contain stressed variants of these vowels in the final position, these will be discussed as they occur.) In word-final position unstressed *e*, *o*, and *ö* are slightly reduced in pronunciation and alternate with *ы* when a suffix is added, e.g., *мудо* /tudo/ 'he/she/it' – *мудым* /tudâm/ 'him/her/it (accusative)'. In this book stress is indicated with a bold letter. Examples:

a) The last vowel in the word is a full vowel:

<i>вучаш</i>	'to wait'	<i>пүртүс</i>	'nature'
<i>пайрем</i>	'holiday'	<i>мотор</i>	'beautiful'
<i>олма</i>	'apple'	<i>изи</i>	'small'

b) The last vowel in the word is *ы*:

<i>эрык</i>	'freedom'	<i>күчык</i>	'short'
<i>калык</i>	'people, nation'	<i>пучымыш</i>	'porridge'

c) The last vowel in the word is *e*, *o*, or *ö* in word-final position:

<i>кече</i>	'day; sun'	<i>пече</i>	'fence'
<i>поро</i>	'good'	<i>юмо</i>	'god'
<i>шүртö</i>	'thread'	<i>күртньö</i>	'iron'

If a word contains only reduced vowels (only *ы*, or *ы* with *e*, *o*, or *ö* in word-final position), stress falls on the first syllable.

<i>пылыш</i>	'ear'	<i>шыже</i>	'fall'
<i>кызыт</i>	'now'	<i>лыве</i>	'butterfly'

Some words containing stressed *e*, *o*, or *ö* in word-final position:

эре	‘always’
тенге	‘ruble’
вучыде	‘unexpectedly’
пальто	‘coat’
пörкө	‘brace drill’

Stressed final *o* and *ö* in particular are rare (though stressed final *o* occurs in some Russian loan words). Stressed final *e*, on the other hand, is part of a small number of productive suffixes.

Note in addition that newer Russian loan words are generally stressed in accordance with Russian pronunciation:

фамилий	‘family name’
физике	‘physics’

In compounds, the stress does not shift to the first word, even if the second word does not contain any full vowels.

н’емыч ‘German’	+ чыве ‘chicken’	= н’емыччыве ‘turkey’
лат- ‘-teen’	+ нылымше ‘fourth’	= латнылымше ‘fourteenth’

Alternate stress patterns are possible for a small number of common lexemes and suffixes (e.g., the dative suffix *-лан*), for example: *уке* ~ *уке* ‘no; is not’, *марте* ~ *марте* ‘until’, *Елулан* ~ *Елулан* ‘to/for Yelu’.

5) Consonant alternation



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a) Obstruents (stops and fricatives) in the final position: Orthographically unmarked alternation affects *ð* in the syllable-final position. In Russian loan words, voiced obstruents are generally subject to terminal devoicing.

ð in Mari words: The letter *ð* is pronounced /d/ when it occurs between vowels. When it is followed by a consonant and also when it is the last letter of the word, it is pronounced /t/, but is still written *ð*. Examples: *вүð* /βüt/ ‘water’ ~ *вүðна* /βüt̚na/ ‘our water’ ~ *вүðеш* /βüdeš/ ‘into the water’ ~ *вүðым* /βüð̚m/ ‘water (accusative)’; *лүðаш* /lud̚aš/ ‘to read’ ~ *лүð* /luð/ ‘Read!’ ~ *лүðшо* /luð̚šo/ ‘(S)he should read.’.

As regards Russian loan words, the voiced consonants *б*, *в*, *з*, and *ð* are, in accordance with Russian pronunciation rules, devoiced in word-final position as well as in the syllable-final position (when followed by a consonant): *флаг* /flak/ ‘flag’ ~ *флагна* /flakna/ ‘our flag’ ~ *флагым* /flag̚m/ ‘flag (accusative)’ ~ *флагем* /flagem/ ‘my flag’.

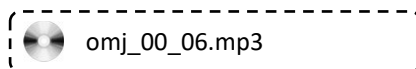
b) Alternation with *з*: In several words *з* in syllable-initial position alternates with *ч* or *м* in syllable-final position: *возаш* /βozaš/ ‘to lie down’ ~ *воch!* /βoĉ/ ‘lie down!’; *визым* /βiz̚t̚/ ‘five (long form)’ ~ *вич* /βiĉ/ ‘five (short form)’ ~ *вумле* /βitle/ ‘fifty’.

c) Voiceless stops in compounds: If the first element of a compound ends in a vowel or voiced consonant, *п*, *к*, and *м* in the initial position of the compound's second element have a tendency to become *в*, *з*, and *д* both in pronunciation and in orthography: *вӱр* 'blood' + *кече* 'day' = *вӱрзече* 'Wednesday', *н'у-* 'no-' + *кунам* 'when' = *н'узунам* 'never', *карме* 'fly' + *понго* 'mushroom' = *кармывонго* 'fly agaric', *кава* 'sky' + *тӱр* 'edge' = *кавадӱр* 'horizon'.

d) Orthographically unmarked alternation /d/ ~ /t/, /g/ ~ /k/: A number of suffixes use the letter *д* or *з* as their first letter in writing, e.g., the ending of the negative gerund *-де* and the comitative case suffix *-зе*. While the letter representing the voiced variant (*д*, *з*) is consistently used in orthography, its voiceless counterpart is pronounced after obstruent consonants (stops and fricatives): *мол-* /tol-/ 'to come' > *молде* /tolde/ 'without coming', but *поч-* /poč-/ 'to open' > *почде* /počde/ 'without opening'; *вуй-поч* /βuj-poč/ 'head and tail' > *вуйде-почде* /βujde-počde/ 'completely (lit. with head and tail)'.

The same pronunciation rule applies to a number of postpositions (words similar in usage to prepositions in English, but placed after a word), conjunctions and particles (e.g., *зыч* 'from', *дек(е)* 'to'), in this case across word boundaries in orthography. While they are consistently realized with an initial *д* or *з* in orthography, their pronunciation depends on the final sound of the preceding word. If it is an obstruent, the voiceless variant of the consonant is pronounced: *ола зыч* /ola gəč/ 'from town', but *мут зыч* /mut kəč/ 'from a word'; *ер дек* /jer dek/ 'to the lake', but *ер-влак дек* /jer-βlak tek/ 'to the lakes'.

6) Vowel harmony



Vowel harmony in Mari is expressed through the choice of specific suffix variants. Many suffixes in Mari have three variants with the vowels *e*, *o*, and *ö* respectively, e.g., the inessive case suffix (answering the question 'where?') with the variants *-(ы)ште*, *-(ы)што*, and *-(ы)шмө*, or the suffix of the passive participle with the variants *-(ы)ме*, *-(ы)мо*, and *-(ы)мө*. The correct choice of the suffix variant is determined by the last full vowel of the word to which it is added – which will generally also be the stressed vowel – and can be summarized as follows:

Last full vowel	Suffix vowel
a e i (a e и)	e
o u (o y)	o
ö ü (ö ÿ)	ö

Note that it is the nature of the vowel sound that matters here. Which letter is used to express a vowel sound is not relevant, i.e., if the sound /e/ is expressed by *e* or *э*, etc.

If a word does not contain any full vowels – i.e., if the stressed vowel is *ы* /ä/ – the suffix vowel *e* is used. Note that in compounds, the final word determines the nature of the suffix vowel: *тул* 'fire' + *йылме* 'tongue' = *тулуйылме* 'flame', inessive *тулуйылмыште*.

Examples with the inessive case suffix:

Nominative		Inessive	
ола	city	олаште	in the city
ер	lake	ерыште	in the lake
кид	hand	кидыште	in the hand
тымык	silence	тымыкыште	in silence
вож	root	вожышто	in the root
мут	word	мутышто	in the word
пöрт	house	пöртыштö	in the house
вўд	water	вўдыштö	in the water

Some examples of foreign names where the vowel harmony is determined by the last final vowel, and not the stressed vowel:

Nominative		Inessive	
Зальцбург	Salzburg	Зальцбургышто	In Salzburg
Тарту	Tartu	Тартушто	In Tartu
Эспоо	Espoo	Эспоошто	In Espoo

As mentioned under point 4, in word-final position *e*, *o*, and *ö* are in most words slightly reduced in pronunciation, i.e., are not pronounced as clearly as when they occur in another position in the word.

7) Russian loan words

A large number of Russian loan words are used in modern Mari. In many cases, they have been adapted to conform more closely with Mari pronunciation and spelling rules.

a) Old loan words: A number of old Russian loan words in Mari have been significantly adapted. In some cases, the meaning has changed as well:

Russian	Mari	Translation
крестьянин	кресаньык	peasant
будто	пуйто	as if
бочка	вочко	barrel
Рождество	Рошто	Christmas
ещё	эше	still
русский	руш	Russian
хоть	кеч	even if
чуть	чуч	just a little

b) Unstressed final vowels: The letters *a* and *я* are often unstressed in word-final position in Russian. In some older loan words, stress has shifted to the final syllable: *машина* 'car' (Russian: *машинa*), *книга* 'book' (Russian: *книга*). For newer and less frequently used loan words, the final vowel is often replaced with *e* or (*ь*)*o*, depending on which letter vowel harmony (see section 6 of this introduction) demands. Note that this can result in unmarked palatalization if the letter combination *ля* or *ня* is replaced by *л'е* or *н'е*. In other cases, the letter *a* is omitted. This categorically happens in the case of Russian words ending in unstressed *-pa*, and sporadically in other cases.

Likewise, the letter *o* is replaced by *e* in word-final position if it is unstressed and if vowel harmony demands *e*.

Russian	Mari	Translation
форма	формо	form
дача	даче	dacha
кухня	кухньо	kitchen
вафля	вафл'е	waffle
сфера	сфер	sphere
газета	газет	newspaper
государство	государстве	state
повидло	повидле	jam

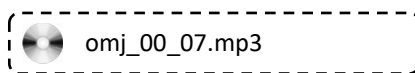
Note that these processes do not always happen; many loan words remain unaffected – *гетто* 'ghetto', *какао* 'cocoa', *радио* 'radio', etc. These words are also not subject to vowel reduction (see sections 4 and 6 of this introduction).

c) Gender endings: Since Mari has no grammatical gender, endings denoting gender in Russian words are often disregarded in loaning. Specifically, this affects words ending in *-ия* /-ija/ and *-ие* /-ije/ in Russian that are loaned to Mari without the final /-a/ or /-e/ denoting gender, resulting in truncated stems in Mari words ending in *-уй* /-ij/.

Russian	Mari	Translation
лекция	лекций	lecture
поэзия	поэзий	poetry
здание	зданий	building

When Russian adjectives are used in Mari, either the nominative singular masculine (ending in *-ий*, *-ый* or *-ой*) is used or the adjective ending is removed completely: Russian: *федеральная служба* 'federal service' > Mari: *федерал службо*.

8) Language sample



Listen to the song “**Икымше Йӧратымаш**” (“First Love”), as performed by the Mari artists Natasha Pushkina and Volodya Matveyev, in order to get a feel for the sound of the language.

Ушыштем – тымык тылзын кас-влакше,
шӱмыштем – йогынвӱд йолгорно.
Ок мондалт икымше йӧратымаш,
ок мондалт Ош Вичын йогынжат.
Ок мондалт икымше йӧратымаш,
ок мондалт Ош Вичын йогынжат.

Тые мыйын чонем йӱлалтенат,
шарналтен ойырлымо жапнам.
Молан, молан чон йӧратымашын
ушнымаш лийын огыл вара?
Молан, молан чон йӧратымашын
ушнымаш лийын огыл вара?

Корнышто энгекеш логалыда гын,
ида волто те шке кумылдам.
Те ушешда налза рвезе жапдам
да эн первый вашлийме тандам.
Те ушешда налза рвезе жапдам
да эн первый вашлийме тандам,
да эн первый вашлийме тандам.

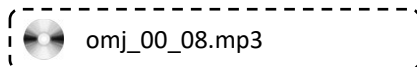
*Ušâštem – tāmâk tâlzân kas-blakše,
šümâštem – jogân büt jolgorno.
Ok mondalt ikâmše jöratâmaš,
ok mondalt Oš Bičân jogânžat.
Ok mondalt ikâmše jöratâmaš,
ok mondalt Oš Bičân jogânžat.*

*Tâje mājân čonem jülaltenat,
šarnalten ojârlâmo žapnam.
Molan, molan čon jöratâmašân
ušnâmaš lijân ogâl bara?
Molan, molan čon jöratâmašân
ušnâmaš lijân ogâl bara?*

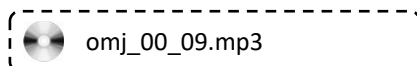
*Kornâšto engekâš logalâda gân,
ida bolto te ške kumâldam.
Te ušeshda nalza rveze žapdam
da en pervâj bašlijme tandom.
Te ušeshda nalza rveze žapdam
da en pervâj bašlijme tandom,
da en pervâj bašlijme tandom.*

9) Exercises

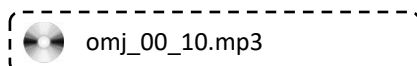
1. Write down the words you hear in this recording in Cyrillic. Translations can be found in the exercise key.



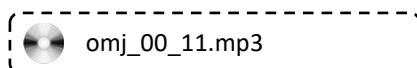
2. Write down the words you hear in this recording in Cyrillic. Translations can be found in the exercise key.



3. Write down the words you hear in this recording in Cyrillic. Translations can be found in the exercise key.



4. Write down the words you hear in this recording in Cyrillic. Translations can be found in the exercise key.



5. Mark the stressed vowels

пеледыш	'flower'	пöртыштö	'in the house'
пеледеш	'it blooms	пöртыштем	'in my house'
пеледын	'it bloomed'	кызытсе	'contemporary'
толеш	'(s)he comes'	нарынче	'yellow'
толын	'(s)he came'	ынде	'now'
туныктышо	'teacher'	лүмдымö	'nameless'
туныктышем	'my teacher'	пöлем	'room'
йылме	'tongue; language'	пылышыже	'his/her ear'

6. Read the following internationalisms used in Mari. Translations can be found in the exercise key.

атом	текст	центр	телефон
такт	дарвинизм	чемпион	митинг
какао	евро	эффект	этике
атаке	журналист	юрист	почто
контакт	зоопарк	япон	жаргон
театр	идей	Австрий	бизнесмен
банк	кабинет	Чехий	шлюз
банан	лампе	Эстоний	горизонт
торт	радио	Германий	конвейер
кино	номер	Венгрий	фильм
бомбо	объект	Россий	адъютант
маске	сандале	Финляндий	дебют
хоккей	текстур	Англий	проект
сайт	университет	Италий	поэт
факс	файл	Испаний	пенсий
ватт	химий	студент	биологий